



"There have been a lot of memorable experiences, but one of the most memorable was when KFOR 2A took over the reigns from 1B," said the 26-year veteran, reflecting on his tour of duty with the division. "That was a very proud moment for me. A lot of work and effort went into the training and preparation for a lot of soldiers for that event. It was a very seamless transition. The beauty of it was, even after the transition, within the first 30 days, you could look at the soldiers downrange; you could look them in the eyes and see the confidence. They had it. They knew the environment. They knew the focus and direction the mission was going. It really set them up to set goals for the next five months."

"Look at the success of the mission in Kosovo and the performance of the soldiers who are down there. The division is recognized Army-wide for the confidence and professionalism in which the Kosovo mission is being reported."

While Preston has been intimately involved with KFOR, traveling to visit the soldiers sometimes two and three times a month, he has also worked to build the division's NCOs into better

leaders through other avenues, as well. One project that he has taken to heart has been increasing the division's membership in the Sgt. Morales Club, the elite club of noncommissioned officers who exemplify leadership by personal concern for the needs, training, development and welfare of their soldiers and their soldiers' families. In the past 14 months, the division has inducted 14 new members.

"For me, personally, that was a highlight that I wanted to continue to promote if I was to stay here within the division. Even now, moving onto [V] Corps, I want to keep the emphasis on the Morales Club," said Preston, who jokes about being the oldest Sgt. Morales Club member on active duty. He was inducted in 1981. "I challenge battalion-level leaders to push one noncommissioned officer per quarter, as a goal, toward getting inducted into the Morales Club. If we try to use that as a yardstick to try to push for one a quarter, it will really help them in growing the level of confidence in the leaders that we want down at the junior ranks."

According to Preston, competitions such as the Sgt. Morales Club, the NCO

and the soldier of the month boards are some of the best platforms for "growing" better enlisted leaders.

"It starts at the company-level. First sergeants really have to do NCO and soldier of the month boards every month. The board process promotes self-study. That's how we grow and mentor young soldiers and noncommissioned officers," the Mount Savage, Md., native stated.

"If you look at our recently selected noncommissioned officer and soldier of the year, imagine having a company filled with noncommissioned officers and soldiers at that level of proficiency," he said. "An organization filled with soldiers like that would be unbeatable in anything they ever attempted whether it's a gunnery, a [Combat Arms Maneuver Training Center] rotation or a Kosovo rotation. They could set a higher mark on the wall for goals because they'd have that level of expertise."

Preston has also placed a great emphasis on effective Sergeants Time Training. On any given Thursday, Preston was on the road somewhere

within the division's footprint, inspecting and observing the NCO-led training.

"Sergeants Time Training is the vehicle with which we sustain the leaders that we've grown downrange. And at the same time, for the up-and-coming young superstars — who are the leaders of tomorrow — it's the vehicle with which we grow these new leaders. It's an opportunity for that first-line leader to take the three or four soldiers that he's responsible for and train them on tasks."

But as Preston calculates his Iron Soldiers' successes, he doesn't just look at gunneries or exercise after action reviews, he looks at the soldiers to measure success.

"Soldiers from the most junior private up to [Maj.] Gen. Casey like the division," Preston said. "We have some of the oldest facilities and oldest motorpools, of any unit, not just in Germany, but across the Army. It's the command climate and the atmosphere in which soldiers live, work and play that keeps soldiers reenlisting and wanting to stay."

"We've had the highest retention rate of any division for the last fiscal year; currently for the first two quarters of the fiscal year, we're the highest. This last quarter was phenomenal. We had 160 percent [of our goal] for initial-term soldier reenlistments and 143 percent for mid-term soldiers."

"Even with the four-month train-up to go to KFOR, coupled with the six-month deployment downrange and then several months of reintegration training once they return, morale is very high. Soldiers really see the difference that their roles make, not only in the unit mission, but in the Army and in the United States' mission."

Even now as he transitions to his new position in Heidelberg,

## *"Once an Iron Soldier, always an Iron Soldier."*

Maj. Gen. George W. Casey, Jr.  
Commander, 1st Armored Division

Preston is still thinking of building Iron Soldiers.

"I don't look at myself as being over the divisions. I see my role as a force provider," he explained. "At V Corps, there's a lot of issues, such as personnel and assignments that need to be worked. There are a lot of things the lower headquarters go to the higher headquarters for, to take that burden off of the lower headquarters."

While Preston may leave the division, his legacy — his back-to-basics philosophy and emphasis on setting the standard — will continue on. As Casey reminded Preston during his farewell ceremony, "Once an Iron Soldier, always an Iron Soldier."



Command Sgt. Maj. Kenneth O. Preston and Maj. Gen. George W. Casey, Jr. have worked side by side ever since Preston assumed the position of division command sergeant major, January 2, 2000.